

Use of Oral English in Project Based Learning

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Abstract

This study focuses on the use of oral tasks to develop students' willingness to communicate (WTC) under a Project Based Learning (PBL) approach. The participants were thirty-one 10th graders from a private school in Chile. The data of this research was collected through audio-recorded lessons and a students' perception rating scale. The findings show that whenever the students were exposed to specific oral tasks, they used English more frequently to ask for information, as opposed to their L1, Spanish. The students also inclined to give more information in English when answering yes/no questions, as opposed to wh- questions. Moreover, the students used their L1 very few times; however, Spanish was still used when the teacher was not monitoring the tasks. The study also revealed that the students perceived they used English in different frequencies for different language functions.

Keywords: English; learning; teaching.

Utilização do Inglês Oral na Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos

Resumo

Este estudo centra-se no uso de tarefas orais para desenvolver a vontade de comunicação dos alunos na Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos. Os participantes foram 31 alunos da 10^a série de uma escola particular no Chile. Os dados desta pesquisa foram coletados através de aulas gravadas por áudio e uma escala de classificação de percepção. Os resultados mostram que, sempre que os alunos foram expostos a tarefas orais específicas, eles usaram o inglês com mais frequência para solicitar informações, em oposição ao L1, espanhol. Os alunos também se inclinam a dar mais informações em inglês ao responder a perguntas de sim/não, em oposição a perguntas de conteúdo de respostas completas. Além disso, os alunos usaram sua L1 poucas vezes; no entanto, o espanhol ainda era usado quando o professor não estava monitorando as tarefas. O estudo também revelou que os estudantes perceberam que usavam o inglês em diferentes frequências para diferentes funções do idioma.

Palavras-chave: Inglês; aprendizagem; ensino.

Utilización del Inglés Oral en el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos

Resumen

Este estudio se centra en el uso de tareas orales para desarrollar las ganas de comunicación de los alumnos en el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos. Los participantes eran treinta y un alumnos de la 10^o grado de una escuela particular en Chile. Se recolectaron los datos de esa investigación por intermedio de clases grabadas por audio y una escala de clasificación de percepción. Los resultados apuntan que, siempre que los alumnos fueron expuestos a tareas orales específicas, ellos usaron el inglés con más frecuencia para solicitar información, en oposición al L1, español. Los alumnos también se inclinan a dar más información en inglés al contestar preguntas del tipo sí/no, en oposición a preguntas de contenido de respuestas completas. Además, los alumnos usaron su L1 pocas veces; sin embargo, el español aún era usado cuando el profesor no estaba monitoreando las tareas. El estudio también apuntó a que los estudiantes percibieron que usaban el inglés en distintas frecuencias para diferentes funciones del idioma.

Palabras clave: Inglés; aprendizaje; enseñanza.

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Introduction

It has been observed among young learners and teenagers that students find working with projects very interesting and engaging. However, several issues concerning the students' performance arise. One of these problems is when students work in projects, the amount of spoken English they produce is very limited. In other words, students do not speak English when developing a project under a PBL approach, which has been defined by Bell (2010) as a student-centered approach in which "learners pursue knowledge by asking questions that have piqued their natural curiosity" (p. 39). It has also been noted that there is a lack of specific oral tasks during the lessons that form part of the complete process of developing a language project. Therefore, students cannot really develop speaking throughout. It is important to mention that not all projects end in an oral presentation, but when dealing with PBL, the unit becomes the project. Solomon (2003) explains that in project-based learning, students work in groups to solve challenging problems that are authentic, curriculum-based, and often interdisciplinary.

The research of this specific problem can serve as a way of solving a common concern among teachers on how to develop speaking skills under a PBL approach. It can besides benefit students because they will learn in a more meaningful and authentic way. The objective of this study was to improve 10th graders' WCT in English through the use of specific oral tasks under a PBL approach. This paper is in the context of the research grant FONDECYT 1191021 entitled *Estudio correlacional y propuesta de intervención en evaluación del aprendizaje del inglés: las dimensiones cognitiva, afectiva y social del proceso evaluativo del idioma extranjero*.

Theoretical Framework

English has been studied, taught and learnt following the perspective of the *Natural Approach*, the *Audiolingual Method*, the *Silent Way*, the *Direct Method*, *Communicative Language Teaching*, *Content-Based Instruction*, *Total Physical Response*, *Cooperative Language Learning*, among others. Richards and Renandya (2008) stated certain principles that promote effective language learning. These are "relatively widely accepted theoretical assumptions about second language acquisitions...and few would dispute as central to most language acquisitions contexts" (Richards & Renandya, 2008, p.12). One of the principles is meaningful learning, which states that if learning is meaningful, it will lead toward better long-term retention, as opposed to mere repetition. Ausubel (2000) claimed that in meaningful learning, students are able to connect new knowledge to previous and existing experiences. This principle is found in Project Based Learning.

Project-based learning

PBL was first used to teach Science in American vocational agriculture classes. Later, it was popularized as "a way of teaching young children by William Heard Kilpatrick, in his book *The Project Method*" (Beckett & Miller, 2006, p. 13), but it was not until two decades ago when it was introduced in the educational field as a way to incorporate the principle of content-based and student-centered teaching. One of the principal aspects of PBL language teaching is to provide language learners with comprehensible input and to produce comprehensible output. Moreover, as Haines mentioned, its aim is to allow students to "recycle known language and skills in natural contexts" (as cited in Beckett & Miller, 2006, p.4). PBL has been defined as a language education approach organized around projects and it focuses on student-centered learning within an experimental learning framework. Projects are "complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities" (Thomas, 2000, p.2) that allow students to work autonomously and create a realistic end-product to provide a solution for that initial real life problem. PBL also addresses different learning preferences.

Speaking skill development and multitasking

According to Chaney, speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (as cited in Kayi, 2006, p.1). Today's world requires students to express themselves by following certain social and cultural rules and thus their communicative skills must be improved. These skills may be developed when they take place in a real-life situation, using authentic tasks and meaningful interaction (Kayi, 2006).

Students can typically perform a wide variety of tasks during the different stages of a project, which means they will necessarily integrate and develop the four basic skills. However, teachers can easily anticipate what skills need to be developed at specific stages of the project. In PBL speaking could be developed at the planning stage by discussing the project aim, length, due dates and so on. In terms of functions, speaking could be developed by asking for information, initiating conversations, changing topics, negotiating or discussing. During the implementation stage, speaking could be developed by using interviews, questions and response sessions after a speaker's talk, planning dates, making decisions, etc. Finally, in terms of the achievement of objectives, speaking could be developed through oral presentations, debates, reports of a project, and so on. Teachers have to provide students with plenty of tasks to use the language. As Nation and Newton (2009) stated, teachers should work hard to create classroom opportunities to speak.

Students' willingness to communicate

A common situation that can be observed among students is the anxiety they feel when speaking the foreign language, and when they see “the classroom situations as threatening, there can be an adverse effect on learning” (Pappamihel, 2002, p. 329). Yashima (2002, p. 55) distinguished three types of anxiety: classroom anxiety, test anxiety and use anxiety. Since learning highly depends on social interaction, then it is only natural to expect students to want to communicate in the target language. Therefore, there is a strong connection between anxiety, communication and learning, because, as Rubin and Thompson (1994) stated, “the more one communicates, the more practice one has in talking and the more one learns” (as cited in Yashima, 2002, p.55). Willingness to communicate (WTC) was first introduced to literature in the 1980s by McCroskey referring to it as a personality trait. However, the concept was later associated to situational variables when it was first applied to the second language acquisition context by MacIntyre and Charos in the 1990s. It was later defined as “the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so” (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels 1998, p. 546). Simić (2014, p. 50) proposed some factors that can influence students’ WTC: classroom atmosphere, group work, wish to practice speaking, interest in the topic, and complexity of the task. Not only is a student’s decision to speak influenced by their personality characteristics, but by the above-mentioned factors leading to the conclusion that “WTC influences language use and use is an important predictor of language vitality” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 11).

Empirical studies on the development of speaking under a PBL approach

In a 2013 study, Maulany aimed at finding out if PBL could improve young learners’ speaking skill. The findings showed that using a PBL approach improved the students’ speaking skill. A study conducted by Zare-Behtash and Sarlak (2017) demonstrated the effectiveness of using PBL to promote learners’ speaking ability. The authors concluded that PBL “reinforced students to be more active” (p. 129).

Method

Type of research

This research is a qualitative study and it falls within a confirmatory scope. It is an action research study, which, in the field of education, is “a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 1). Johnson also defined it as “the process of studying a real school or classroom situation in order to understand and improve the quality of actions or instructions” (Johnson, 2009, p. 1).

Research problem and objectives

A recurrent problem when working with projects is when students work in groups to prepare it, they do not use English as often as they should, so there is a difficulty to develop speaking. It has been observed that students use their L1 - Spanish - to communicate because it is probably easier for them and because they might feel more comfortable using it. Thus, the research question stems out: If specific oral tasks that promote speaking within a PBL approach are used, will 10th grade students improve their WTC in English?

General objective

- To examine 10th grade students’ willingness to communicate in English based on PBL specific oral tasks.

Specific objectives

- To analyze how much English students use during the specific oral tasks.
- To identify the participants’ perception of the number of classroom speaking opportunities they have to communicate in English.

Participants

The school chosen for this research was a private school in Chile. The participants of this research were thirty-one 10th grade students. There were eighteen girls and thirteen boys. The participants’ ages ranged between 15 and 16 years old. The class’ average grade was 6.6 (measured in a scale that goes from 1.0 to 7.0), and 97% of the students have a passing grade of 4.0 or above. Most of the participants of this study have been exposed to the language for ten years on average. The students meet for English class three times a week; twice in a 90-minute lesson, and once in a 45-minute lesson. For this study, six 90-minute lessons were used.

Stages of the research study

The topic of the project was *Healthy lifestyles*. As a final product of the PBL approach, students were asked to create a *Do’s and Don’ts video* that promoted or hindered healthy habits. The stages of the study are shown in Table 1.

Data collection techniques

In order to collect data that would help analyze the impact of the methodology, audio-recorded lesson stages, and a Likert scale to measure students’ perception were used.

Table 1. Stages of the research study.

	What was done?	How was it done?
S1	Reflection on teaching practice	Monitoring and observation of students in group work activities
S2	Design of action plan	Planning of lessons and material creation
S3	Implementation of action plan	Six lessons: 1. Piloting of PBL 2. Video, game <i>Find someone who...</i> Writing of list of healthy habits 3. Video and brainstorming of ideas. Writing of <i>Healthy habits survey</i> 4. Conducting of survey, writing of a list of unhealthy habits 5. Design and editing of video 6. Sharing of final product: <i>Do's and Don'ts video</i>
S4	Gathering and analysis of data	Rating scale and audio recording of lesson phases
S5	Final reflection	Analysis of findings, discussion and conclusion

Note: S1: Stage 1; S2: Stage 2; S3: Stage 3; S4 Stage 4, S5: Stage 5.

Audio-recorded lesson stages

The first data collection instrument that was used was audio-recorded lesson stages. The objective was to find out whether the students used the English in certain phases. This instrument was intended to analyze how much English students used in the specific oral tasks. Two phases of three different lessons were audio-recorded. The lessons were divided into phases, which were delimited by different tasks. The sample for the first instrument was the whole class, but the analysis was based only on some students – the ones who were randomly recorded, either by the teacher or the students themselves, and the ones who submitted their recordings.

The phases that were audio-recorded were chosen under the criteria that during those specific phases students had the opportunity to use English to orally communicate. Therefore, those three phases would give the necessary data to fulfill the achievement of the first specific objective. Phase 4 in lesson 1, and phase 3 in lesson 3 were audio-recorded. Besides, field notes on the events that took place in phase 3 of lesson 2 were taken.

For phase 4 in lesson 1, the students played a game called *Find someone who...* in which they had to ask each other questions to find out information so they could fill out a chart with the names of the students who answered affirmatively to the descriptors in the chart (e.g. ... *has done yoga this week, ... has eaten whole grains this morning*). As the students asked and answered questions, some of them were audio-recorded randomly. Also, some students audio-recorded their participation in the game at different times. Later, they submitted the recordings for further analysis. For phase 3 in lesson 3, the students conducted the survey they had created (*Healthy habits survey*) and they were randomly audio-recorded as well.

Students' perception rating scale

The second data collection instrument that was used was a Likert scale that was designed to identify the participants' perception on the number of speaking opportunities they had to communicate in English. The rating scale aimed at finding out how frequently they perceived they used English for certain specific functions of the language and it allowed to analyze the students' WTC from their own point of view. The scale had six descriptors that described the times they used English: *to interact with my classmate, to ask for information, to give information, to express my opinion, to use affirmative statements, and to use negative statements*. The students were asked to mark the frequency they perceived they had used English during the game *Find someone who...*, and over the *Healthy habits survey* they had created and conducted. The frequency adverbs used were: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently* and *Always*.

Data analysis techniques

Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected through the audio-recorded lesson' stages. The steps for this analysis were the following:

- Four different audio recordings were transcribed and allowed data saturation for the categorization process. The purpose of the transcription was to identify thematic coherence, as a way to establish relationships among the categories, and generating themes and sub-themes.

- The statements from the transcriptions were categorized.
- Themes and sub-themes were identified.
- The number of times the themes and sub-themes occurred were counted.
- Examples of each of the sub-themes were identified.

Frequency analysis

The rating scale measured the students' perception or attitude towards the opportunities they had to use English orally. Each descriptor was presented as a statement, to which the students had to express their perception or attitude by choosing one of the categories (adverbs of frequency). Therefore, a frequency analysis was carried out, by adding the number of times the adverbs emerged for each descriptor, thus, obtaining a broader view of which descriptor was used more frequently.

Findings

Specific Objective 1: To analyze how much English students use during the specific oral tasks

The thematic analysis allowed the distinction of two dimensions. The first one is the *Language students used to ask for information* and the second one is the *Language students used to give information*. Each dimension was divided into themes and sub-themes.

Dimension 1 corresponds to the language students used to ask for information. In this dimension, one can identify two main themes. The first theme (See Table 2) is *Students use Spanish to ask for information*. The second theme (See Table 3) is *Students use English to ask for information*. In the first theme, three sub-themes were identified:

Table 2.

<i>Dimension 1: Language students use to ask for information</i>			
Theme 1: Students use Spanish to ask for information			
Sub-themes	SB1	SB2	SB3
Frequency	10	19	1

Note: SB1: Students use Spanish to ask yes/no questions; SB2: Students use Spanish to ask wh-questions; SB3: Students use Spanish for off-topic questions.

Table 3.

<i>Dimension 1: Language students use to ask for information</i>			
Theme 2: Students use English to ask for information			
Sub-themes	SB1	SB2	SB3
Frequency	69	12	56

Note: SB1: Students use English to ask yes/no questions; SB2: Students use English to ask wh- questions; SB3: Students use English to ask for clarification.

Students use Spanish to ask yes/no questions, Students use Spanish to ask wh- questions, and Students use Spanish for off-topic questions. In the second theme, three sub-themes were identified as well: *Students use English to ask yes/no questions, Students use English to ask wh- questions, and Students use English to ask for clarification.*

In the first theme, as shown in Table 2, it is observed that students used Spanish more frequently to ask wh-questions than to ask yes/no questions, even though the frequency was not very different. In addition, there was one isolated event in which a student used Spanish to ask a question that was not related to the topic of the lesson or to the topic of the task. Even though it only happened once, it could show a desire to use Spanish in off-topic events during the lesson.

In the second theme (See Table 3), it is observed that students used English more frequently to ask yes/no questions than to ask wh- questions, showing a great difference between those two subthemes. Furthermore, Table 3 shows how students used English frequently to ask for questions to clarify information. This may show a possible relationship between the time students used English to ask yes/no questions and the immediate use of English to ask questions to clarify information. Even though in most cases this meant the students used one or two words in English. In general, students used Spanish more frequently to ask wh- questions. Also, students used English more frequently to ask yes/no questions.

Dimension 2 corresponds to the *Language students used to give information*. In this dimension, two themes can be identified: *Students use Spanish to give information* and *Students use English to give information*. In the first theme (See Table 4), four sub-themes were identified: *Students use affirmative statements in Spanish, Students use negative statements in Spanish, Students use Spanish to give opinion, and Students translate concepts into Spanish.* In the second theme (See Table 5), five sub-themes were identified: *Students use affirmative statements in English, Students use English to give short answers, Students use English to give open answers, Students use classroom language in English, and Students use adverbs in English to talk about frequency.*

Table 4.

<i>Dimension 2: Language students use to give information</i>				
Theme 1: Students use Spanish to give information				
Sub-themes	SB1	SB2	SB3	SB4
Frequency	4	3	3	4

Note: SB1: Students use affirmative statements in Spanish; SB2: Students use negative statements in Spanish; SB3: Students use Spanish to give opinion; SB4: Students translate concepts into Spanish.

Table 5.

<i>Dimension 2: Language students use to give information</i>					
Theme 2: Students use English to give information					
Sub-themes	SB1	SB2	SB3	SB4	SB5
Frequency	3	43	7	11	10

Note: SB1: Students use affirmative statements in English; SB2: Students use English to give short answers; SB3: Students use English to give open answers; SB4: Students use classroom language in English; SB5: Students use adverbs in English to talk about frequency.

The first theme (See Table 4) shows that the four sub-themes appeared in similar frequencies. This may show a tendency to use Spanish for different cases in the same frequency, because the difference of frequency is not significant.

The second theme (See Table 5) shows a clear tendency to use English more frequently to give short answers. This was significantly higher than using affirmative statements in English, which was not frequent. It is possible to observe that students used English to give open answers, to use classroom language and to use adverbs of frequency in several occasions. However, students used English more frequently to give information using short answers.

Specific Objective 2: To identify the participants' perception on the number of speaking opportunities they have to communicate in English

In order to identify the 10th grade students' perception on the number of speaking opportunities they had to communicate in English, a rating scale was conducted. It

measured the frequency in which the students used English for six different functions. Thus, the question *what functions of the language do students use to communicate in English?* has six descriptors. Each descriptor has five different adverbs of frequency: *Never*, *Rarely*, *Sometimes*, *Frequently* and *Always*. The rating scale was conducted on 29 students who marked the frequency in which they used the language functions, according to their perception during two specific oral tasks. The following analysis incorporates the findings of the data collected through this instrument and the description identified for each of the six descriptors (See Table 6).

As Table 6 shows, there are different frequencies for the descriptors. In the first descriptor, it can be seen that most participants said they *Sometimes* used English to interact with classmates. Also, none of them said they *Never* used English to interact with their classmates. In the second descriptor, and same as in the previous one, Table 6 shows that most students said they *Sometimes* used English to ask for information. None of them - again - said they *Never* used English to ask for information. In the following descriptor, most students mentioned they *Rarely* or *Sometimes* used English to give information. A similar situation can be observed in the fourth descriptor. Even though most participants used English to express their opinions, some of them mentioned they *Never* used it to give opinions - this is the highest number of students in all the descriptors. In the fifth descriptor, the same tendency of the first two descriptors is observed. Again, the highest frequency of students using English for affirmative statements was *Sometimes*. The only frequency that did not appear was *Never*. In the last descriptor, a similar situation is observed as to the previous one. None of the students expressed that they *Never* used English for negative statements. Again, most of them said they *Sometimes* used the language.

Discussion

The first analysis to discuss corresponds to the first specific objective (SO1). In the first dimension, a high frequency of times in which students asked wh-questions using Spanish was distinguished, and a high frequency of times in which students asked yes/no questions using English was also distinguished. The number of times the sub-theme *Students use English to ask yes/no questions* emerged was considerably higher than the number of times the sub-theme *Students use Spanish to ask wh-questions* appeared. These two sub-themes are being taken into consideration, because they were the two highest frequencies in themes 1 and 2, respectively in the first dimension. Therefore, based on those two higher frequencies, it could be said that English was the language students used the most to ask for information. Besides, the sub-theme *Students use English to ask for clarification* occurred quite frequently, and it happened almost always after the sub-theme *Students use English to ask yes/no questions*. In almost all of the transcripts, whenever a participant asked a yes/no question, and another participant answered, the first participant asked another question to clarify the information.

Table 6. *Students' perception on number of opportunities to communicate in English.*

Nº	Descriptor	N	R	S	F	A
1	I used English to interact with my classmates	0	7	14	5	3
2	I used English to ask for information	0	5	12	7	5
3	I used English to give information	1	9	9	6	4
4	I used English to express my opinion	5	9	6	6	3
5	I used English for affirmative statements	0	5	12	7	5
6	I used English for negative statements	0	6	10	7	6

Note: N: *Never*; R: *Rarely*; S: *Sometimes*; F: *Frequently*; A: *Always*.

Furthermore, an interesting isolated sub-theme was observed: *Students use Spanish for off-topic questions*. This only happened once during the revision of the transcripts. It could be said that students felt more comfortable using Spanish to refer to anything that was not related to the topic of the task. It could also mean that students stayed focused on topic all throughout the phases, since no other off-topic questions were identified in any of the two dimensions.

In the second dimension, there was a high frequency of occasions in which the sub-theme *Students use English to give short answers* occurred. This could mean that the students showed a tendency to give information using English when answering yes/no questions. On the other hand, the lowest frequencies were the sub-themes *Students use English to give open answers* and *Students use affirmative statements in English*. This could mean that students did not use the language frequently to answer wh-questions. However, if analyzed together with the first dimension, it is an expected behavior, since students asked more yes/no questions in English than wh-questions in English. Therefore, it could be interpreted as the students felt more comfortable using English for more precise and closed structures than with more open and flexible structures of the language, for instance, whenever they had to answer a yes/no question, instead of giving an opinion about a topic.

In terms of the use of Spanish, it can be observed that the four sub-themes for the use of Spanish to give information did not show a significant difference in the number of times they occurred. This shows that students used their L1 to give information very few times, as opposed to the times they used their L1 to ask for information (Dimension 1).

Finally, it is important to mention that even though there are clear inclinations of higher and lower frequencies of the number of times English or Spanish were used, both languages were used throughout the lesson. Even when English was used more frequently, students still used Spanish, especially whenever the teacher was not around to directly

monitor their task and performance. This can occur because there is a tendency of students feeling more comfortable using Spanish unless being told to use English and being directly monitored. It seems as though students incline to communicate in English as long as they are being assessed by the teacher. This could mean that as long as there are specific tasks to develop their oral skills, students will use the language.

The second analysis corresponds to the second specific objective (SO2), which aimed at identifying the participants' perception on the number of speaking opportunities they had for different functions of the language. There were six descriptors in the rating scale used, each one referring to one specific language function. Thus, the participants identified the frequency in which each one of them occurred during the game *Find someone who...* and the *Healthy habits survey*.

In the first descriptor, it could be said that students perceive they used the language to some extent for any kind of interaction during the specific tasks. Since none of them said they *Never* used English to interact, it could be said that, to some extent, students used the language to communicate in English if we understand communication as "the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another" (Keyton, as cited in Lunenburg, 2010, p. 35). In the second descriptor, it can be said that students used English to ask for information in different frequencies. Regarding the third descriptor, it can be said that students used the language to some extent, but that they felt more comfortable using Spanish, or that they focused on completing the task, regardless of the language they used. It could also mean they do not consider short answers when using the language, as opposed to open answers, which were considerably less frequent in the second dimension in SO1. Similarly, in the fourth descriptor, it could be said that students were less willing to communicate in English when they had to give opinions, which meant using non-specific structures or

tenses, allowing a more flexible use of the language. In the fifth and sixth descriptor, the tendency can be interpreted as the students felt they used the language to some extent to communicate. It could also mean they felt comfortable using both affirmative and negative statements, since the frequencies are very similar in both descriptors.

Based on the above interpretation of the findings and the possible reasons, it can be mentioned that the research implementation was a success in terms of the use of English. Although it is not possible to state whether there was an increase in the use of the language, it can be said that the participants communicated in English. Of course, this happened in different frequencies, but it occurred, even more than what was initially expected.

These participants seem to have a good understanding of the English language. They seem to understand the spoken and written language. They also seem to be able to orally communicate. However, it is interesting to mention what the teacher – who was also a research practitioner - observed directly during the game *Find someone who...* and the *Healthy habits survey*, conducted during the study. The students were able to speak English and use the oral language for different functions. However, whenever the teacher was not around to listen to them, Spanish took place. This could mean that the fact that students do not speak in English does not necessarily mean they do not speak the language, or they lack grammar proficiency or vocabulary. It could mean they simply feel it is easier to use their mother tongue when nobody is watching them, because they might feel more comfortable or it might be faster to deliver a message. In addition, whenever the students were asked a question directly in English, they regularly answered in English as well.

Conclusion

In order to draw some conclusions about this research, some interesting findings mentioned in the previous chapters can be summarized. The first finding that can be mentioned is the high frequency of times students used English for specific functions, which were stated in the sub-themes of the two dimensions that were established in SO1. In general, the participants used English to ask yes/no questions very frequently and to ask questions to clarify information, the latter one occurring after the yes/no questions in almost all the cases. Also, the participants gave information in English more frequently when using short answers, as opposed to open answers. This was not a surprising behavior, given the nature of the questions that were being answered.

Regarding SO2, the main finding that could be observed was the fact that for most language functions, the participants were able to use English. In most cases their perception was that they sometimes used English, and in few occasions, only some participants mentioned they rarely or never used the language. Also, the functions in which they used English the most were to interact, to ask for information, and to use affirmative and negative statements. Besides, the

functions in which they used English least frequently were to give information and to give their opinions.

An important conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that teachers need to be aware of what is going on inside the classroom in any teaching situation. Teachers need to see that learners “are on track” (Bell, 2010, p. 40). It is paramount to identify the students’ needs to be able to take actions and improve the teaching practice for the benefit of the students. This research has truly been a self-reflection practice that has meant an in-depth and detailed study of the classroom and the students. Furthermore, even though only one specific topic was covered, this research has given room for further studies and questions to be answered. For instance: how can teachers monitor students better when working with specific oral tasks in a PBL approach?, especially if the tasks chosen - a game and a survey – allow students to interact more, move freely around the classroom and speak more naturally. Alternatively, what is the role Spanish plays in the development of a project within a PBL approach? These are just two questions that arise when working with PBL, which was chosen on the basis that students would undergo a major change in their school curriculum in a near future. Although it was an attractive approach, certain limitations arose, such as planning according the school’s schedule, students’ absence to some classes, students’ level of proficiency and technological drawbacks, such as the good or bad functioning of the equipment.

Another key reflection is the fact that students may always know in advance a little bit of the language and that their proficiency should not be underestimated just because they apparently do not speak frequently. The present study followed the framework of action research, which was defined as “a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 1). This research showed that it is not just a matter of knowing or not knowing the grammar rules or the vocabulary. It is a matter of how willing they are to communicate and to use the language to speak. In general, students inclined themselves to communicate, however, the fact that they are immersed in a specific school system in which completing the language task faster is more important than the quality of the task itself, may indicate they are used to the idea that it is easier to use Spanish instead of English in class.

Recommendations

As a recommendation, it is important to integrate all four skills when working with PBL. It will keep the lesson dynamic, it will allow the lesson to move smoothly and will allow students to stay on task. It is also essential that all the tasks and all the skills are connected to the project or to the final product the students will create. As Bell (2010) said, “PBL is not a supplementary activity to support learning. It is the basis of the curriculum” (p. 39). Thus, PBL ends up being an integral part of the syllabus and not just an end-of unit project.

Moreover, even though students had not been really exposed to a PBL approach before, their response was undoubtedly positive. The students showed interest in working with projects, because it meant a change and a break in their routines, just as one of the research participants expressed "If I learned like this during the year, I would have better grades, because the lessons would call my attention and I would be interested in paying attention". It could be said that students might be more interested in learning if they worked with PBL all the time. From day one, the students showed how interested they were in the product they were going to create and in the topic as well. This should lead all teachers to believe that they must not be afraid of changing and of innovating.

Additionally, it is essential to choose topics that are relevant, authentic and meaningful to the students. This will keep them motivated, which is what happened with this particular group of students in the study. The fact that they were allowed to use web pages, apps, videos, was crucial for the success of the approach. As Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) proposed, students must be part of projects that allow them to go beyond their abilities by using new technologies.

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